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MRS. RAKESTRAW, RADIO-TV PIONEER, PLANS 1980 RETIREMENT

ATLANTA -- Mrs. Caroline Leiding Rakestraw, Executive Director of the Episcopal Radio-Television Foundation since 1954, plans to retire later this year.

The announcement was made by the Rt. Rev. Harold B. Robinson, Bishop of Western New York and chairman of the Foundation trustees, at the annual board meeting here late in April.

The exact date of Mrs. Rakestraw's retirement will be determined by the date of availability of her successor. A search committee, chaired by the Very Rev. Cecil Woods, Dean of the Virginia Theological Seminary, is at work.

In making the announcement, Bishop Robinson had high praise for her work. "This dedicated Christian woman has completely committed her many talents to the work and growth of the Foundation for the past 26 years.

"She has brought it from a dream to a reality that can look back upon its record of achievement during these past years with deep gratitude and an undeniable sense of accomplishment. Furthermore, she has laid strong foundations upon which can be built a promising future in the field of religious education and evangelism which is becoming increasingly important."

Mrs. Rakestraw, a lifelong member of St. Luke's Parish here, served as executive secretary for the Diocese of Atlanta from 1942 to 1952 and held numerous diocesan posts. From 1952 to 1954, she was executive secretary of the communication department of Province IV of the Church.

While working in Atlanta in 1945, Mrs. Rakestraw and Bishop John Moore Walker initiated "The Episcopal Hour" as a segment of the year-around Protestant Hour, a radio program which began with 26 stations in the southeast and grew until it now is carried by more than 550 stations throughout the country. In recent years the preachers on this series have included the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church.

Mrs. Rakestraw has initiated many award-winning programs. These include the "One Reach One" television series dealing with moral and ethical problems, the cassette tape production of the complete King James version of the Bible, read by Alexander Scourby, and the cassette program of "The Four Loves" by C.S. Lewis -- the only professional recording ever made of C.S. Lewis' voice.

For many years, Caroline Rakestraw patiently pursued the motion picture and television rights to the C.S. Lewis seven-volume classic The Chronicles of Narnia. She ultimately won these rights for the foundation, and "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" was aired on prime time by CBS on successive evenings near Easter in 1979 and 1980, to wide acclaim. The production won an "Emmy" award. Other Narnia books may be televised in the future.

Mrs. Rakestraw has long been active in volunteer work for the Episcopal Church, especially in teaching Church school. She is a widow, and the mother of one daughter who lives in New York City.

She was educated at the University of Georgia and has done additional work at Columbia and Syracuse Universities and at Union Theological Seminary. She was awarded the honorary Doctor of Divinity degree by the University of the South.

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